

## YOUTH COURT: A POSITIVE MENTORING OPPORTUNITY FOR AREA ATTORNEYS AND AN ALTERNATIVE FOR FIRST TIME JUVENILE OFFENDERS



*Attorney Valerie Smith and the Cordova High School Youth Court Team*

The Juvenile Court of Memphis and Shelby County has launched its first juvenile delinquency diversion and peer-justice program – Youth Court. Using restorative justice principles, Youth Court is dedicated to rehabilitating first-time nonviolent offenders--holding them accountable for their behaviors and educating them about citizenship.

The Youth Court's goal is to use positive peer pressure to ensure that young people who have committed offenses repair the damage they caused to their victims and community. Most importantly, Youth Court provides the opportunity for the young offender to receive the help he or she needs to avoid further involvement in the juvenile justice system.

The Youth Court is exclusively comprised of adult and student volunteers. The student volunteers are from local high schools and the adult volunteers are local attorneys. The volunteer attorneys use their skills and experience in order to prepare the students to prosecute, defend and to serve as bailiffs and jurors in "real" sentencing hearings of juvenile offenders. The attorney volunteers also have the opportunity to get "black robe fever" and preside as judge during the court proceedings.

Since the first Youth Court hearings were held on February 24, 2011, several area attorneys have volunteered their time and talents to this worthy program by mentoring students in preparation of the hearings. Those attorneys are **Constance Alexander, Asia Diggs, April Bostick, Jocelyn Henderson, Andre Mathis, Mozella Ross, Alicia Washington, Kimbrough Mullins, Pamela Skelton, Valerie Smith, Rachel Scott Woodall, Elbert Jefferson, Jr., Samuel Jones, David McKinney and James Sanders.**

Valerie Smith, a local attorney, believes the Youth Court program is a worthwhile endeavor. "As an attorney, I am excited to have the opportunity to participate in the Youth Court Program...It makes me happy to be able to interact with these young people who are selflessly giving their time to this project. This project gives me hope not only for the children who volunteer, but also for the children who have exhibited a need for help and entered the Juvenile Court system."

Many more attorneys have signed on to be volunteers and many more are needed. If you are interested in this volunteer opportunity, or simply want to request more information about Youth Court, please contact Ms. Avis Lamar, Youth Court Coordinator at 901/405-8720.



*Attorney Samuel Jones and Youth Court attorney Delois Ford go over last minute details prior to their hearing.*

*This program is funded under an agreement with the State of Tennessee.*